

## TIPS ON RAISING YOUR PRE-TEENS AND TEENS

Let's Talk About...

### Teen Drivers

Teen drivers have more car crashes than any other age group. Per mile traveled, they are involved in the greatest number of car crashes, from crashes involving property damage to those that are deadly. The problem is the worst among 16-year-olds, who have the least driving experience. Their immaturity makes them most likely to take risks behind the wheel. The following causes usually contribute to the death of teenagers involved in car crashes:

- **Driver error, because teens are inexperienced drivers**
- **Speeding**
- **Single-vehicle crashes in which the driver loses control**
- **Distractions from other teen passengers**
- **Alcohol, particularly in the later teen years**
- **Night driving**
- **Low seatbelt use**

### What Parents Can Do

**Don't rely solely on driver education.** High school driver education may be the most convenient way for teens to learn how to drive, but it doesn't mean your teen will be a safe driver. However, poor driving skills are not always to blame for an accident. Teen attitudes and decision-making matter more. Teens often think they cannot be harmed, so they may not use safety belts and some seek thrills like speeding. Training and education do not change these behaviors. Peers often have a strong influence on one and other, but parents have a lot of influence too. Talk to your new driver about this new responsibility and remind him or her that driving is a privilege and not a right. If you do not think he or she is mature enough to handle the responsibility and follow the rules of the road, do not be afraid to make him or her wait to get a license and to drive.

**Follow the laws for teen driving restrictions.** To learn about the law in your state, go to

<http://www.iihs.org/laws/graduatedLicenseIntro.aspx>.

**Restrict night driving.** Most nighttime fatal crashes involving young drivers occur between 9 pm and midnight. New drivers should not drive

after dark until they are experienced. Late outings tend to be recreational, even teens that usually follow the rules can be easily distracted or encouraged to take risks by their friends.

**Restrict passengers.** Teen passengers can distract a beginner driver and/or lead to greater risk-taking. About 6 of every 10 teenage passenger deaths (59%) during 2003 occurred in crashes with a teen driver. While night driving with passengers is particularly dangerous, many fatal crashes with teen passengers occur during the day. The best plan is to limit the number of friends your teen can have in the car.

**Supervise practice driving.** Take an active role in helping your teen learn how to drive. Plan a series of practice sessions in different situations, including night driving. Give beginners time to work up to challenges like driving in heavy traffic or on the freeway. Supervised practice should be spread over at least six months and continue even after a teenager graduates from a learner's permit to a restricted or full license.

**Remember that you are a role model.** New drivers learn a lot by example, so practice safe driving all the time. Teens with previous car crashes and violations often have parents with poor driving records.

**Require safety belt use.** Just because your teen wears his/her seat belt while driving with you does not mean they are wearing it when they drive alone or when they are out with friends. Remember that belt use is lower among teenagers than older people. Insist that your teen wear a seatbelt all the time. If you find out that your teen is not wearing a belt, take his or her driving privilege away for a period of time. Teens must also understand that as a driver they are responsible for all the passengers and must insist that everyone in the car wear a seat belt at all times.

**Prohibit drinking.** Make it clear that it is illegal and highly dangerous for a teenager to drink alcohol.

**Choose vehicles for safety, not image.** Teenagers should drive vehicles that reduce their chances of a crash and offer protection in case they do crash. For example, small cars don't offer the best protection in a crash. Avoid cars with performance images that might encourage speeding. Avoid trucks and sport utility vehicles, the smaller models are prone to roll over and larger vehicles are difficult to maneuver, especially for inexperienced drivers.

**Talk to your teen about drowsy driving.** Drowsiness impairs judgment, vision, hand-eye coordination, and reaction times just like alcohol and other drugs. The National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration and the National Organization for Youth Safety report that teens are chronically tired. This creates a potentially dangerous situation.